

Socio-demographic and Economic Characteristics of Grandparent-maintained Households: Early Evidence from Census 2000

Data from the Census 2000 1% Public Use Microdata File are used to examine the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of grandparents with co-resident grandchildren. These data provide a unique opportunity to identify grandparents who do or do not have financial responsibility for co-resident grandchildren and to know duration of such responsibility. Significant differences between these two groups of grandparents warrants skepticism of the assumption used in previous research that grandchild co-residence is an adequate proxy of financial responsibility for the grandchild. All else equal, grandparents who assume financial responsibility for co-resident grandchildren have a lower income to poverty ratio and a greater likelihood of receiving public assistance than do grandparents who do not assume financial responsibility. The most economically vulnerable appear to be those who are relatively young, single, have fewer earners in the home, relatively lower levels of education, one or more disabilities and incomes at or below poverty. Diversity among grandparents providing financial support for co-resident grandchildren suggests that different public policies may be needed to provide support for this caregiving role.

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Introduction

During the 1990s, attention of the media, public policy makers and researchers focused on the dramatic growth in the number of grandparent maintained households. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of children under 18 living in grandparent-maintained homes rose only slightly, from 2.2 million to 2.3 million. By 1997, however, 3.9 million children lived in their grandparent's home, a 77% increase over 1970 (Bryson & Casper, 1999).

From 1970 to 1992, the proportion of multigenerational households with at least one parent present grew relatively faster than other types of grandparent-headed households. Since 1992, however, so-called "split generation" households with no parent present have experienced the greatest growth (Bryson & Casper, 1999). Of the nearly 4 million children in grandparent-maintained households in 1998, 35.5% were in split-generation households with no parent present. Three-generation households comprised the remainder (12.6% with both parents in grandparent home, 45.8% with mother in grandparent home; 6% with father in grandparent home) (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998).

Reasons for recent growth in grandparent-maintained homes vary. Minkler (1999) cites rising levels of teen pregnancy and parental divorce, substance abuse by parents, child abuse or neglect, or the death, illness or incarceration of parents. In times of economic downturn, extended periods of parental unemployment or poverty can also be contributing factors (Generations United, 2002).

Two broad types of research on grandparent-maintained households exist, each having strengths and weaknesses. Small, qualitative studies have typically focused on either specific groups of caregivers or specific issues such as the impact of caregiving on caregiver health (See, for example, Dowdell, 1995; Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997; Minkler & Roe, 1993). While these studies have highlighted various challenges of caregiving, findings cannot be generalized to a wider group. Other research has used nationally representative data such as the Current Population Survey (CPS) and quantitative, multivariate analysis to explore the characteristics of grandparent-maintained households (Casper and Bryson, 1998). Although findings from this type of research can be generalized, data limitations necessitate assuming that co-residence of a grandchild alone is sufficient to denote financial responsibility for that grandchild. To the extent that this assumption is incorrect, measures of the characteristics and economic status of grandparents who provide financial support for co-resident grandchildren will also be incorrect.

Recently released data from Census 2000 directly addresses this limitation of previous multivariate analysis. In the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Congress mandated that Census 2000 collect data on the co-residence of, financial responsibility for, and duration of care for grandchildren. This paper utilizes the 1-Percent Public Use Microdata (PUMS) from Census 2000 to expand what is known about the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of grandparent-maintained households. Like the CPS data,

these data are nationally representative. As an improvement on the CPS data, however, analysis of the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of grandparent-maintained households using PUMS can be based on respondent report of caregiving status rather than on assumptions regarding caregiving responsibilities, reducing the possibility of misreport. Clearly, accurate assessment of the characteristics of grandparent caregivers is critical for those who design and implement programs or public policies to serve this group.

Review of Literature

Existing research on grandparents rearing grandchildren has focused on the quality of interpersonal relationships among grandparent, parent, and grandchild generations and on the demographic, health and economic characteristics of residents in grandparent-maintained households (Casper & Bryson, 1998). The latter types of studies are relevant to this research and are briefly reviewed here.

Casper and Bryson (1998) classified grandparent-maintained households by marital status and gender of the grandparent caregiver and analyzed the impact of family structure on grandchildren's economic well-being, health insurance coverage, and receipt of public assistance. They found that grandchildren in grandmother only, no parent present families were most likely to be poor and to receive public assistance. Grandchildren in both grandparents, no parent present families were most likely to be uninsured.

Chalfie (1994) used 1992 Current Population Survey data to examine characteristics of skipped generation households. She found the median age of such grandparent caregivers was 57. Three-quarters of grandparent caregivers were married; over 90% of single grandparent caregivers were women. Although over two-thirds of all grandparents were white, African-American grandparents were nearly two times as likely as their white counterparts to rear their grandchildren (9% versus 5%, respectively). Four in ten grandparent caregivers were near poor or poor. Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver (1997) used 1992-1994 National Survey of Families and Households data to examine characteristics of both skipped and three-generation households. Like Chalfie (1994), they found that the majority of the grandparent caregivers in their sample were female, married, and non-Hispanic white. In addition, they note that being unmarried, female, or African American was associated with increased likelihood of becoming a caregiver. Bryson and Casper (1998) and Rutrough and Ofstedal, (1997) also had similar findings for race and gender.

Several small qualitative studies have found evidence of health problems in grandparent maintained families in both generations. Poor patterns of eating and sleeping, weakened immune systems, asthma, physical disability and hyperactive have been noted among grandchildren reared by grandparents (Dowdell, 1995; Minkler & Roe, 1996; Shor & Hayslip, 1994). Among grandparents rearing grandchildren, multiple chronic health problems, high rates of depression, and poor self-rated health have been recorded (Dowdell, 1995; Minkler & Roe, 1993). Using national data, Fuller-Tompson and Minkler (2000) found rates of depression nearly twice as high for caregiving grandmothers as compared with those in more traditional grandparent roles. Custodial grandparents were significantly more likely to have limitations in activities of daily living (ADLs) and to report lower levels of satisfaction with health than their non-custodial counterparts (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999)

Well over 80% of grandparent-maintained households have one or more earners in the household (Bryson & Casper, 1999). Despite this fact, several studies note that rates of poverty are disproportionately high among grandparent-maintained families (Bryson & Casper, 1999; Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson, Minkler & Driver, 1997; Rutrough & Ofstedal, 1997).

These findings suggest that diversity exists among grandparent-maintained families. Some grandparents, such as those who are minority race or without a spouse or in poor health, appear to be at relatively greater risk of economic instability and insufficiency. It is also possible, however, that not all grandparents with these characteristics have financial responsibility for a co-resident grandchild. The use of Census data in this study makes it possible to explore that issue.

Method

Data and Sample

The data used in this study are from the 1-percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 Census of Population and Housing, an independently drawn subsample of all data collected in Census 2000. Questions of interest to this research were asked on the long form of the decennial census questionnaire, which was sent to approximately 1 in 6 households. In addition to all questions on the short form, the long form asked detailed questions about the economic, social, and housing characteristics of each household resident and household.

There are no missing data in the public use files. In cases of non-report or inconsistent report from survey respondents, the Census Bureau has allocated data using various appropriate statistical techniques (U. S. Census Bureau, 2003).

The Census Bureau gathered data on grandparent caregiving only from those aged 30 and older. From this age group, this study selected those who were designated as either the householder or the spouse of the householder and who had replied “yes” to the question of having a co-resident grandchild. To avoid double-count of household characteristics in married-couple households, only the wife record was retained. This decision was based on the well-established predominance of women as family caregivers (Folbre, 1994). Thus, the final sample used in this study consisted of male or female household heads with no spouse present and wives in married couple families who had indicated they had an own-grandchild who was under age 18 and co-resident in their household (weighted N = 2,943,014, representing approximately 2% of the population aged 30 and over). For this research, no distinction was made between split- and multi-generation households.

Empirical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to compare the characteristics of grandparents with co-resident grandchildren who do or do not have financial responsibility for these grandchildren. Four multivariate models were developed to examine factors associated with various measures of financial and economic well-being of grandparent-maintained households. In Model 1, logistic regression was used to examine the factors associated with having financial responsibility for a co-resident grandchild. Model 2 used ordinary least squares regression (OLS) to explore factors associated with 1999 poverty status of householder. In Model 3, logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with receipt of public assistance in a multivariate context. This model is comparable to one used by Bryson and Casper (1999) with CPS data on grandparent-headed households with co-resident grandchildren. These three analyses used the sample of all grandparents with co-resident grandchildren. In Model 4, OLS was also used to investigate the relationship between having financial responsibility for a co-resident grandchild and hours of employment. This analysis excluded grandparents who were aged 65 and older since they would typically be retired rather than potentially in the labor market. All analyses were weighted.

Conceptual Framework

The empirical analysis in this study was broadly guided by life course theory, realities of household resource management, and prior research. The central idea of life course theory is that individuals use age norms to develop “mental maps” of the experiences and roles that are ahead in their life and when those roles are likely to occur (Settersten & Hagestad, 1996a, 1996b). Life transitions are generally less problematic if they occur when anticipated because there has been sufficient time to plan and prepare. When such expectations are not met, problems can arise. For example, when poor health or corporate downsizing force an early retirement, research indicates the transition to retirement is much more difficult than had it occurred when expected (Atchley, 1996). Life course theory points to the importance of including age of the grandparent caregiver in analysis to mark current lifecycle stage and to control for age-related role expectations.

The demands and resources of grandparents thrust into a caregiver role can be broadly classified as personal and economic. When grandchildren go to a grandparent’s house to stay, demands on grandparent’s time and money significantly increase. As a custodial grandparent commented, “Before [my young granddaughter came to live with me] I had all the freedom. I didn’t need a babysitter; I didn’t need to check to see if I could go out of the house or when I had to be back...She really thrives best on a routine, so that has definitely cut my leisure, plus the fact that babysitting’s expensive. I don’t have the money to do that.” (Jendrek, 1993, p. 616).

Demands of caregiving can force a reduction in labor force participation among working-age grandparents, especially when grandchildren are young or have significant health and behavior problems. Presence of a spouse can mitigate some of these pressures as childcare tasks and income can be shared, thus family composition – married couple household versus a household headed by a male or female with no spouse present – is considered in this research. Demands on economic resources are measured by the age of children present in the home, household size, and number of household residents under age 18. Differences in regional costs and economic opportunity are measured by region of residence and nonmetropolitan residence. Specific source of income, number of workers in the household, and level of income relative to the poverty threshold (poverty rate) are used to measure source and level of economic resources. Caregiver disability status is also considered as it could constrain ability to give care and to be employed.

Prior multivariate analysis of CPS data on grandparent-maintained households utilized various measures of economic well-being and family structure, number of children in the household, region of residence, metropolitan area residence, income relative to poverty level, and the race and ethnicity, age, educational attainment, work status

of the grandparent (Bryson & Casper, 1999). To facilitate comparison of results, insofar as possible, similar variables were used in the multivariate analysis in this study.

Variables

In Census 2000, presence of a co-resident grandchild was identified by response to the question "Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment?" Those who indicated such co-residence were also asked if they were "financially responsible for food, shelter, clothing, day care, etc. for any or all grandchildren living in the household." Grandparents were then asked to report the duration of such financial responsibility for the grandchild for whom they had been responsible for the longest time. Duration was categorized as less than 6 months, 6 to 11 months, 1 or 2 years, 3 or 4 years, and 5 years or more (U. S. Census Bureau, 2003).

The other variables used in this study were broadly classified into personal characteristics of the grandparent, household characteristics, and household resources. Note that wife data is used in the case of a married couple.

Personal Characteristics of the Grandparent

Age. Age of grandparent as of April 1, 2000 was a Census Bureau calculated variable, typically derived from birth date information. Reported age was used when birth date was not available. Mean age is reported in the descriptive analysis. For both descriptive and multivariate analysis, age was classified into five categories: less than 45, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, 65 to 74, and 75 and older. Less than 45 was the reference category in the multivariate analysis.

Race and Ethnicity. Census 2000 gathered detailed information on race and ethnicity and, unlike previous census, allowed survey respondents to identify themselves as multi-racial. In this research, race is classified in singular terms. That is, those who are classified in Census 2000 as "white alone" are white; "black alone" are black; Native American includes only those who are American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander and no other race; "Asian alone" is Asian. "Other" includes those who report some other race alone or two or more major race groups. "Hispanic" was based on self-report of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino origin. White was the reference category in the multivariate analysis.

Education. Grade and degree completion are reported in Census 2000. This information was recoded into four categories: less than high school, high school, some college (which included both those who attended college and did not earn a degree and those who completed an associates degree) and college (which included those who earned either a baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate, or professional degree). High school degree was the reference category in the multivariate analysis.

Employment Status. Employment status is reported for 1999. Those who did not work at all during 1999 were classified as not employed. Those who worked between 1 and 34 hours per week in 1999 were classified as part-time employed while those who worked 35 hours per week or more in 1999 were classified as full-time employed. For the multivariate analysis in Models 1, 2, and 3, not employed was the reference category.

Disability Status. Unlike the CPS, the Census did not obtain a report of health status. Consequently, disability status serves as a proxy of health status in this research. Census respondents were asked if they had long-lasting sensory or physical disabilities. Sensory disabilities included blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment. Physical disabilities included conditions that substantially limited one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying. Census respondents were also asked if they had a physical, mental, or emotional condition that had lasted six months or more and had made it difficult to perform certain activities. Activity categories were: mental - learning, remembering, concentrating; self-care disability - dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home; going outside the home disability - going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office; and employment disability - working at a job or business. "Have disability" is coded 1 for those who report having one or more disabilities. Presence of an employment disability is considered in the multivariate analysis of receipt of public assistance and hours of employment.

Household Characteristics

Family Type: Family type was classified as married couple, female head with no spouse present, or male head with no spouse present. Married couple is the reference category in multivariate analysis.

Age of Related Children Under Age 18: By definition, all households selected for this study had at least one co-resident grandchild under age 18. Households could also have children with other relationships to the householder, including own children. This variable is a measure of the proportion of grandparent-maintained

households with children present in two specific age categories: under age 6 only and 6 to 17 only. The reference group would be those households with children in both age groups, preschool and school-aged.

Household Size: This variable is a count of all those who occupy a given housing unit.

Housing Tenure: Survey respondents were classified as renters, own home with mortgage or own home without a mortgage.

Region of Residence: Residence is classified into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. South served as the reference category in multivariate analysis.

Nonmetropolitan Resident: This variable was coded 1 if resident of a nonmetropolitan area, 0 otherwise.

Household Resources:

Total Household Income. Income is reported for the prior year. The public use data is bottom-coded at a loss of \$59,999 or more and top coded at \$99,999,999 or more. As with all survey data collections, the possibility of underreport of income exists since individuals are asked to state total income from all sources in the prior year and memory can fail, especially for small or infrequent income receipt.

Income Source: Income source notes whether or not the grandparent had income in 1999 from any one or more of eight possible sources including wage and salary, self-employment, interest, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, public assistance, retirement, and other.

Number of Workers in the Household: This is a count of the number of workers currently present in the family.

Poverty Status: Household income is compared with the official poverty threshold for a household of similar size and age composition. Relative to the appropriate poverty threshold, household income can be less than 100%; between 100% and 199%; between 200% and 299%; between 300% and 399%; between 400% and 499%; or equal to or greater than 500%.

Hours Worked: Hours worked is a count of hours worked per week in 1999.

Findings and Discussion

Of those reporting co-resident grandchildren, only 50.53% indicated they also had financial responsibility for those grandchildren. Significant differences were found between virtually all of the personal and household characteristics and household resources of grandparents who did or did not have financial responsibility for a co-resident grandchild. This is a very important result as it clearly indicates that relying only on co-residence of a grandchild to identify cases of financial responsibility for the grandchild could bias results.

The focus in prior qualitative research studies on the challenges faced by Black, single grandmothers who have become financially responsible for a co-resident grandchild has tended to create a stereotype that most grandparent caregivers fit this profile. Findings of this research presents quite a different picture, however, as most financially responsible grandparents are white and married, a finding consistent with previous research (Bryson & Casper, 1999; Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997; Rutrough & Ofstedal, 1997). The profile of the grandparent who is financially responsible for co-resident grandchildren that emerges from the descriptive analysis also differs from the profile Bryson and Casper (1999) present following their analysis of grandparent-maintained households using CPS data.²

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1. Grandparents who do and who do not provide financial support for a co-resident grandchild have significantly different characteristics on virtually every dimension.

A large proportion of grandparents who have financial responsibility for co-resident grandchildren are young. Almost 22% of this group is under age 45; 36.96% are aged 45 to 54. These proportions are significantly higher than those for grandparents who are not financially responsible for a co-resident grandchild. These proportions are also somewhat higher than those reported by Bryson and Casper (1999) for comparable age groups using CPS data, especially for the youngest age group (21.97% with Census data; 19% for grandmothers and 15% for grandfathers with CPS data). Thus, this is an example of possible bias if the focus is on co-residence alone. The youth of these grandparents suggests that teen pregnancy may be a contributing factor to their status.

In accord with previous research, over half of both groups of grandparent-maintained households are white. These proportions are somewhat comparable with those reported by Bryson and Casper (1999) (51.96% white for financially responsible grandparents with Census data; 48% white for grandmothers and 60% white for grandfathers with CPS data). The proportion of Blacks among financially responsible grandparents using Census data is somewhat higher than the proportion for grandparent maintained households using CPS data (33.64% Black using Census data; 31% Black grandmothers and 18% Black grandfathers with CPS data). While Bryson and Casper (1999) classify all other races as “other,” this research separated out Native American and Asian from “other.” It is

interesting to note that, although the proportion of Native Americans in either grandparent group is small, the proportion is about 1.5 times greater for those grandparents with financial responsibility. The proportion of the sample reporting Hispanic ethnicity is comparable to previous research (Bryson and Casper, 1999).

Among grandparents with co-resident grandchildren, about a third do not have a high school degree. Bryson and Casper (1999) had similar findings with CPS data for this category of education. They combined the remaining categories of education into one group. This research indicates that an additional third of both groups of grandparents had a high school degree and just under a fourth had some college. This human capital is an important resource. Those with higher levels of education may be able to command relatively better wages in the labor market as well as effectively access and utilize social resources. Grandparents with financial responsibility for co-resident grandchildren were more likely than their counterparts without financial responsibility to be employed at least part time (59.60% versus 55.25%, respectively). Using CPS data, Bryson and Casper (1999) note 66% of grandfathers and 51% of grandmothers with co-resident grandchildren were employed.

Disability can increase the burden of care giving. Thus, it is quite striking to note that over a third of grandparents with a co-resident grandchild indicated having at least one form of disability. Those grandparents who had financial responsibility for a grandchild reported slightly though significantly higher levels of physical and mental disability than those who did not have financial responsibility (20.31% and 7.40% versus 20.04% and 7.22%, respectively).

Among those providing financial support for a co-resident grandchild, nearly 4 in 10 had done so for at least one grandchild for 5 years or more. The next largest proportion, nearly one-fourth of the sample, had given support for 1 to 2 years and about 15% had given support for 3 to 4 years. Clearly, for many, providing financial support became a long-term commitment. Of course, with cross sectional data, we do not know the complete duration of caregiving, only the status at time of the survey. Many of the 23% reporting giving care for less than a year are likely to be only in the first part of a longer commitment.

Grandparents with financial responsibility for a co-resident grandchild appear to have relatively fewer resources than their counterparts. They had a smaller household size but a larger number of household residents under age 18 (4.66 versus 5.19 and 2.10 versus 1.91, respectively). Household income for financially responsible grandparents is about 80% that of non-financially responsible grandparents (\$49,800 vs. \$62,966) with most of that income coming from wage and salary earnings. Financially responsible grandparents were more likely to receive Supplemental Security Income or public assistance and to have income levels at or below the poverty threshold. They were also more likely to reside in the South and in non-metropolitan areas, factors which may further reduce economic opportunity.

Four multivariate models were used to explore factors associated with the characteristics and economic well-being of grandparents with co-resident grandchildren (see Table 2). Model 1 indicates that having financial responsibility for a co-resident grandchild is relatively more likely for young, Black or Native American grandparents, those with no degree or some college as compared with high school graduates, non-metro residents, those with older children, those with a relatively larger number of household residents under age 18 and residents in the South and in non-metropolitan areas. These findings further support the evidence from the descriptive statistics that teen pregnancy appears to be a major precipitating factor for being financially responsible for a co-resident grandchild, given the relative youth of the grandparents and the likelihood that the other household residents under age 18 are other children of the grandparent.

Model 2 indicates that being financially responsible for a co-resident grandchild was negatively and significantly related to poverty status, measured as ratio of income to poverty threshold, all else equal. Whether assuming financial responsibility for a grandchild pushed the grandparent into poverty cannot be ascertained from cross-sectional data. It is apparent, however, that being a minority race other than Asian as compared with white, being Hispanic, having lower levels of education, no spouse, and larger household size are associated with relatively greater income deficits (note that lower numbers for poverty status indicate deeper levels of poverty as measured by the degree to which income levels fail to reach the poverty threshold).

Model 3 indicates that receipt of public assistance is more likely for those who are financially responsible for a co-resident grandchild, under age 45, those of minority race except Asian, those without a high school diploma, single household heads, those with older children in the home, residents of all regions as compared with the South, and those with incomes below 100% of poverty. In contrast, in their assessment of factors related to receipt of public assistance in grandparent-maintained families using CPS data, Bryson and Casper (1999) did not find that race or ethnicity, having an older child in the home, having no high school degree, region of residence or metropolitan area were significant. Again, these differences suggest that bias may be present if co-residence alone is used to proxy financial support of co-resident grandchildren.

Model 4 results suggest that being financially responsible for a co-resident grandchild does not affect the number of hours that workers contribute to the labor market. Interestingly, having older co-resident grandchildren and a relatively larger number of household residents under age 18 is negatively related to labor market hours. Further investigation would be needed to better understand the reasons this is the case. Prior research indicates that children in grandparent-maintained families are likely to have special health or education needs or to be at risk for substance abuse or other behavior problems (Dowdell, 1995; Minkler & roe, 1996; Shor & Hayslip, 1994). Thus, it is possible that the time required to care for older grandchildren precludes grandparent employment. Larger family size increases the comparative advantage of nonmarket versus market production. Grandparents aged 45 to 64 contribute fewer hours to the labor market as compared with grandparents under age 45. Again, this result may reflect the time demands of older grandchildren. Alternatively, it may be that the older age cohort assumed a caregiving role after already making the decision to specialize in non-market production, specifically child and home care. Presence of a spouse creates greater opportunity for such specialization, so use of the wife's record in married couple families in this research could also contribute to this result.

Implications

Without question, when a parent can no longer care for a child, either family or society must step forward to provide that support. Certainly, grandparents form a vital economic safety net for their grandchildren. It has been estimated that, of the 2.1 million children living with grandparents or other relatives with no parent present, only about 145,000 are in the foster care system, representing about one-fourth of the entire foster care population. If the remaining 2 million children also entered the foster care system, taxpayers could face a bill in excess of \$9 billion dollars (Generations United, 2002).

Providing financial support for co-resident grandchildren is not without cost to the grandparents, however. Although nearly 60 percent of grandparents providing financial support are employed at least part time, almost half have incomes at or below the poverty threshold. Even after taking other factors that could affect poverty status or receipt of public assistance into account, grandparents who assume financial responsibility for co-resident grandchildren have a lower income to poverty ratio and a greater likelihood of receiving public assistance than do grandparents who do not assume financial responsibility. Further, about 13% of grandparents providing financial support are beyond retirement age. These results suggest that increased labor force participation is not likely to be a viable means of raising income for many grandparent caregivers.

Close examination of the descriptive analysis suggests there are distinctly different groups among grandparents providing financial support of their co-resident grandchildren. Age of the grandparent marks different lifecycle stages and suggests differential impacts of assuming financial responsibility for a grandchild. For younger grandparents, providing financial support for co-resident grandchildren can reduce opportunity to save for their own retirement, home ownership or other important goals. Some older grandparents, on the other hand, may have to stretch a fixed and meager post-retirement income around greater needs.

Type and level of resources are another way to classify grandparents providing financial support of their co-resident grandchildren. One group would appear to have sufficient resources to meet the economic demands of caregiving. In this group would be those who are married, have more earners in the home, have relatively higher levels of education, have few to no disabilities and those whose income levels are at least 200% of the poverty threshold. Indeed, a little over 10% of grandparents who are financially responsible for co-resident grandchildren have incomes in excess of 500% of poverty; a little over half have incomes in excess of 200% of poverty. Another group appears to be quite a bit more economically vulnerable. In this group would be those who are relatively young, single, have fewer earners in the home, relatively lower levels of education, one or more disabilities and incomes at or below poverty. Further research is needed to identify the extent to which these risk factors "cluster together" in the lives of grandparents providing financial support for co-resident grandchildren. Still, it is clear that not all grandparents with co-resident grandchildren may need public assistance or other forms of financial support.

Type and number of disabilities would be a third way to consider the needs of grandparents who provide financial support of their co-resident grandchildren. Physical and mental disabilities are more prevalent among grandparents who provide financial support than for those who do not. Grandparents with disabilities are probably most in need of aid or support since disability not only makes it more difficult to obtain and maintain steady employment for those of working age, it also makes it more difficult for grandparents of all ages to provide adequate care and supervision of children. Disruption of the expected life course for grandparents is likely to add additional stress.

In summary, results of this study indicate that only about half of all grandparents with a co-resident grandchild have financial responsibility for that grandchild. Significant differences exist in the characteristics of those who do and those who do not assume such financial responsibility. Consequently, one must be skeptical of the assumption that co-residence of a grandchild alone is an adequate proxy for a grandparent having financial

responsibility for the grandchild. Further, public policy should recognize the diversity of characteristics and needs of grandparents who have assumed financial responsibility for one or more grandchildren.

This research represents a broad exploration of newly available, nationally representative public data on grandparent caregiving. More remains to be learned. Comparisons of the economic resources different groups of grandparents providing financial support for co-resident grandchildren – younger vs. older grandparents, employed vs. retired, majority vs. minority race, Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic, married vs. single – could be made. Interaction between various types of disability with caregiver characteristics, employment and economic status could be explored. Data on housing structure and costs that are available in Census 2000 could be used to create an alternative assessment of resource deficits among grandparents with co-resident grandchildren. Also of interest would be assessment of the impact of public policy initiatives to mediate the financial impact of assuming care of a co-resident grandchild. For example, to what extent would use of the Earned Income Tax Credit by employed grandparents reduce their chances of being in poverty? What would be the impact of extending an equivalent amount of public support to those grandparents who are not employed but are in poverty? Along the same lines, data on state of residence in Census 2000 data makes it possible to compare and contrast the economic status of grandparents with co-resident grandchildren by state or region. Effects of different state family support policies could be explored.

Limitations

Although the ability to clearly identify not only presence of co-resident grandchildren but also financial responsibility for those grandchildren is critical for accurate assessment of the characteristics and economic status of grandparents, Census 2000 data present some limitations for better understanding the issues of grandparent caregiving.

Findings from qualitative research indicate that the family crisis that precipitates the need for grandparent caregiving also may often lead to mental, emotional, or physical problems for the grandchild. Parental substance abuse is a poignant case in point (Burton, 1992). Caring for a child with such challenges greatly increases caregiver burden. Time commitments of this type of care may preclude grandparent employment and make it difficult to build and maintain a social support network. It would be of interest to know both the extent of disability among grandchildren, especially among those of preschool age, and whether grandparents or their grandchildren had health insurance coverage. Unfortunately, Census 2000 did not obtain data on disability status of household residents under age 5, nor was information on health insurance obtained.

Neither Census 2000 nor the CPS asked questions about reasons for becoming a grandparent caregiver and the specific challenges faced by grandparents trust into the role. Qualitative research is still needed to explore issues such as family and social barriers to obtaining legal custody of the grandchild, values driving the choice to give care, and the emotional and social consequences of giving such care.

Cause and effect relationships cannot be teased out using cross sectional data. We see in this research, for example, that grandparents providing financial support for their co-resident grandchildren are more likely to be disabled and in poverty. Are these situations the result of assuming the caregiving role or are they preexisting conditions that may have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the family crisis that leads to the caregiving role? Longitudinal data would be needed to sort out what conditions come before and what conditions come from assuming financial responsibility for a co-resident grandchild.

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Endnotes

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- ² Given slight differences in samples examined, the descriptive findings of this research are best compared with Bryson and Casper's (1999) findings for grandmothers.

Table 1

Characteristics of grandparents who are or are not financially responsible for grandchildren

	Have Co-resident Grandchildren	
	Are not financially responsible weighted N=1,455,964	Are financially responsible weighted N=1,487,050
Personal characteristics		
Mean caregiver age	55.96 (110.97)^a	53.02 (101.51)
Age < 45	15.85	21.97
Age 45 to 54	34.03	36.96
Age 55 to 64	27.13	27.10
Age 65 to 74	16.28	10.91
Age 75 and older	6.72	3.06

Race		
White	56.42	51.96
Black	26.16	33.64
Native American	1.72	2.62
Asian	3.48	2.04
Other	12.23	9.74
Hispanic	20.83	16.00
Education level		
< High school	36.96	36.41
High school	33.36	32.28
Some college	21.72	24.26
College	7.96	7.04
Employment status		
Not employed 1999	44.75	40.40
Part time emp. 1999	11.61	12.43
Full time emp. 1999	43.64	47.17
Disability status ^b		
Have disability	34.53	36.14
Sensory disability	5.56	5.07
Physical disability	20.04	20.31
Mental disability	7.22	7.40
Self-care disability	6.02	5.38
Unable to go out	14.77	13.73
Have emp. disability	19.16	19.25
Length of care giving		
< 6 months		11.96
6 to 11 months		11.08
1 or 2 years		22.93
3 or 4 years		14.85
5 years or more		39.18

Table 1 continued

	Have Co-resident Grandchildren	
	Are not financially responsible weighted N=1,455,964	Are financially responsible weighted N=1,487,050
Household characteristics		
Family type		
Married couple	47.92	51.81
Female head	44.54	43.02
Male head	7.54	5.17
Related children < 18		
Age < 6 only	33.72	22.05
Age 6 – 17 only	36.76	46.34
Mean Household size	5.19 (18.10)	4.66 (18.60)
Mean number < 18	1.91 (11.90)	2.10 (12.81)
Region of residence		
Northeast	18.47	14.18
Midwest	17.63	18.63
South	38.27	46.81
West	25.63	20.37
Nonmetro	3.36	4.72
Household resources		
Mean total household income	62966.10 (499799.82)	49800.08 (475356.30)
Income source		
Wage and salary	51.98	56.35
Self employment	4.56	4.14
Interest	12.39	9.15
Social security	25.27	18.42
Supplemental security income	5.68	6.67
Public assistance	3.53	9.66
Retirement	12.61	9.63
Other	8.65	9.88
Housing tenure		
Rent	25.88	32.62
Own with mortgage	51.51	48.34
Own without mortgage	22.60	19.04
No. of workers in household		
None	29.06	45.87
One	22.02	30.12
Two	32.35	30.50
Three or more	38.58	23.63
Poverty rate		
< 100%	13.98	22.34
100%	22.70	26.56
200%	22.42	20.62
300%	16.73	12.85
400%	10.90	7.21
≥ 500%	13.26	10.42

a. Bold indicates a significant difference at $p < .0001$ based on results of a chi-square test for categorical and a t-test for continuous variables.

b. More than one disability could be selected.

Table 2

Multivariate analyses of grandparent caregiver characteristics and economic status

	Model 1 Logistic regression Financially Responsible for Grandchild		Model 2 OLS Regression Poverty Status	Model 3 Logistic Regression Public Assistance Receipt		Model 4 OLS Regression Hours Worked
	Parameter estimate (standard error)	Odds ratio	Parameter estimate (standard error)	Parameter estimate (standard error)	Odds ratio	Parameter estimate (standard error)
<i>Personal characteristics</i>						
Financially responsible for co-resident grandchild	----	----	-35.388*** (1.395)	0.845*** (0.055)	2.329	-0.032 (0.250)
Grandparent age						
Age 45 to 55	-0.337*** (0.035)	0.714	28.195*** (2.050)	-0.025 (0.067)	0.976	-2.259*** 0.334
Age 55 to 64	-0.618*** (0.039)	0.539	40.857*** (2.271)	-0.305*** (0.078)	0.737	-8.728*** 0.371
Age 65 to 74	-1.116*** (0.049)	0.328	60.058*** (2.808)	-0.654*** (0.099)	0.520	----
Age 75 and older	-1.521*** (0.070)	0.218	72.121*** (3.800)	-0.809*** (0.147)	0.445	----
Grandparent race and ethnicity						
Black	0.223*** (0.029)	1.249	-31.414*** (1.693)	0.411*** (0.062)	1.508	-1.173*** (0.308)
Native American	0.488*** (0.084)	1.629	-52.423*** (4.388)	0.504** (0.135)	1.657	-2.434** (0.793)
Asian	-0.309*** (0.077)	0.734	3.300 (4.395)	0.325 (0.174)	1.384	1.755* (0.829)
Other race	0.032 (0.048)	1.032	-10.818*** (2.793)	0.344** (0.096)	1.410	0.804 (0.492)
Hispanic	-0.280** (0.041)	0.756	-30.252*** (2.391)	-0.277** (0.089)	0.758	-0.273 (0.427)
Grandparent education level						
< High school	0.112** (0.030)	1.119	-36.829*** (1.718)	0.532*** (0.062)	1.702	-6.810*** (0.311)
Some college	0.125*** (0.0324)	1.133	28.422*** (1.856)	-0.067 (0.078)	0.935	3.956*** (0.323)
College	0.0401 (0.0484)	1.041	80.100*** (2.764)	-0.489** (0.167)	0.613	7.710*** (0.497)
<i>Household characteristics</i>						
Male-headed household	-0.3179*** (0.0513)	0.728	-54.270*** (2.863)	0.267* (0.135)	1.306	9.693*** (0.550)
Female headed household	-0.1363*** (0.0258)	0.873	-89.278*** (1.472)	1.115*** (0.063)	3.049	4.247*** (0.264)

Table 2 continued

	Model 1 Logistic regression Financially Responsible for Grandchild		Model 2 OLS Regression Poverty Status	Model 3 Logistic Regression Public Assistance Receipt		Model 4 OLS Regression Hours Worked
	Parameter estimate (standard error)	Odds ratio	Parameter estimate (standard error)	Parameter estimate (standard error)	Odds ratio	Parameter estimate (standard error)
Children < 6 only	-0.3920*** (0.0381)	0.676	10.6583*** (2.184)	-0.179* (0.086)	0.836	-0.649 (0.377)
Children 6 to 17 only	0.5545*** (0.0364)	1.741	8.476*** (2.067)	0.345*** (0.069)	1.413	-2.530*** (0.367)
Number of HH residents < 18	0.0111*** (0.0121)	1.011	-19.819*** (0.6991)	0.189*** (0.019)	1.208	-1.109*** (0.121)
Region of residence						
North east	-0.3739*** (0.0349)	0.688	27.919*** (2.001)	0.632*** (0.071)	1.881	-1.281** (0.366)
Midwest	-0.1493*** (0.0334)	0.861	20.318*** (1.928)	0.433*** (0.072)	1.541	1.282** (0.345)
West	-0.3098*** (0.0332)	0.734	25.336*** (1.898)	0.674*** (0.073)	1.962	0.384 (0.342)
Nonmetro	0.1817** (0.0612)	1.199	-36.704*** (3.037)	-0.203 (0.126)	0.816	-1.147* (0.541)
Household resources						
Worked part time 1999	0.0522 (0.0397)	1.054	37.245*** (2.257)	----		----
Worked full time 1999	0.0183 (0.0288)	1.018	92.585*** (1.644)	----		----
Have employment related disability	----	----	----	----	----	-2.930*** (0.312)
Poverty Status						
100-199% Poverty Level	----	----	----	-0.626*** (0.058)	0.535	----
200-299% Poverty Level	----	----	----	-1.378*** (0.085)	0.253	----
300-399% Poverty Level	----	----	----	-1.554*** (0.117)	0.211	----
400-499% Poverty Level	----	----	----	-1.929*** (0.181)	0.145	----
> 500% Poverty Level	----	----	----	-2.039*** (0.175)	0.130	----
Intercept	0.5114 (0.0588)		266.965*** (3.512)	-4.624*** (0.127)	-4.127 (0.132)	31.971*** (0.568)
Likelihood ratio Chi-Square	2147.7590***			3071.5971***		
-2 Log Likelihood	430336.350			11878.871		
Adjusted R ²			0.3710			0.1230

*** p < .0001; ** p < .001; * p < .01